

**School Improvement Conversation Starters
School District and Accredited Non-Public School
Site Visits**



**2010-2011 School Year
Iowa Department of Education**

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BOARD OF EDUCATION

Questions:

Vision, Mission, Goals; Leadership

1. How does the board maintain focus on the district's current vision, mission, and goals?

Vision, Mission, Goals; Leadership; Collaborative Relationships; Curriculum and Instruction

2. How are stakeholders involved in determining goals for the improvement of students' academic success and social / emotional well-being?
3. How is the district / school preparing students for the 21st Century?

Collaborative Relationships; Monitoring and Accountability

4. How does the school board communicate district / school information to the public regarding finances, student achievement, and other aspects of the district / school?

Leadership; Monitoring and Accountability

5. What aspects of the evaluation of the superintendent are most beneficial to the board and the superintendent in their work toward continuous improvement?
6. **(For school districts only)** What expectations does the board hold for the role of the district's equity coordinator in providing equity in programs and employment? Please provide examples.

Collaborative Relationships

7. In what ways to the district / school and its local and regional community share resources?

Professional Development

8. How is the school board kept informed of the district's / school's professional development focus and results?
9. How does the board plan for its own professional development?

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Vision, Mission, Goals; Leadership; Monitoring and Accountability

10. Please share what you believe to be your district's / school's:

- Accomplishments over the past five years
- Obstacles delaying progress
- Changes hoped to be achieved in the next five years

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE) TEACHERS

Questions *(All questions in the CTE interviews are required questions and were developed and approved by the Bureau of Career and Technical Education Services staff, Summer 2010, and includes updates for Perkins IV):*

1. What are the strengths of the program area you represent?

Curriculum and Instruction

2. How are the district's CTE programs providing students with a strong understanding of all aspects of a job or career and success in a diverse work environment?
3. What curricular connections are being made between CTE and core content areas?

Learning Environment

4. When you think about the students in your programs, those who are highly involved, those who are loners, those who may look or act differently from their peers, would all students say they feel safe? Why or why not?

Professional Development

5. How are you supported in professional development? Please describe the CTE, building, and district-related professional development.

Collaborative Relationships, Monitoring and Accountability

6. Tell us about the CTE Advisory's involvement with standards, benchmarks, critical competencies or performance indicators; technical skill attainment assessments, and proficiency levels as required by Perkins.
7. How does the district monitor course enrollment patterns, proportionality, and achievement gaps to ensure CTE programs prepare CTE students, including special populations, for occupations that lead to self-sufficiency?
8. Describe the district's progress in meeting the goal that 75% of the CTE programs be aligned with a program of study?

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9. The end-of-year Perkins Performance Report includes information such as Academic Attainment (*i.e.*, math and reading), Graduation Rates, Non-traditional Participation and Completion, Technical Skill Attainment, Program Completion, and Placement. Based on the end-of-year data collection and analysis, what changes have been made to improve programs and what else needs to be done?
10. When the cycle for evaluating CTE programs is considered:
 - How have the findings from recent evaluations impacted the CTE programs?
 - What progress do you hope to see as a result of studying program evaluation findings?

GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS
Grades Pre-K – 12

Questions:

Vision, Mission, and Goals

1. How do your professional practices align with the vision, mission, and goals of the district?

Leadership

2. How are you encouraged and supported to take on leadership roles in your district and building?
3. Explain the teacher evaluation system and how it enhances instructional and professional practices.

Collaborative Relationships

4. Please describe the opportunities, purposed, and results of collaboration among:
 - Colleagues
 - Students
 - Parents
 - Community

Learning Environment

5. What does the district do to create and to sustain a safe learning and social environment for all students?
6. What school practices and classroom procedures are implemented that create a student-centered learning environment?

Curriculum and Instruction

7. What tools and technology are available in your school and how to teachers use these to enhance instruction and student learning?
8. What is the shared vision of effective instruction in your building?

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9. Describe the opportunities teachers have for district- and building-level conversations about curriculum, as well as the alignment of district curriculum with the Iowa Core.

Professional Development

10. How are teachers involved in determining the focus of professional development, including teachers' individual professional development plans?
11. Please tell us about the recent history of district and building professional development.

Monitoring and Accountability

12. How are student-learning data monitored at the classroom and building levels and how are data used to inform instructional decisions?
13. **(For school districts only) NCLB-required question:** Describe the process used to maintain security of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills and Iowa Tests of Educational Development test materials prior to, during, and after test administration.
14. Please share what academic and non-academic changes you hope to be achieved in the next five years.

INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT STAFF
Pre-K – 12

Questions:

Collaborative Relationships

1. Please describe the collaboration that occurs among paraeducators and classroom teachers.

Professional Development

2. What training have you had to prepare for your assignments?
3. What additional supports do you need to do your job well?
4. For those of you assigned as a one-on-one paraeducator for a student, how have you been trained to decrease students' dependency on your assistance?
5. What training and support have you received to prepare you for addressing student behavior and school climate issues, including bullying and harassment?

Curriculum and Instruction

6. How are you informed of your job role and responsibilities?
7. Describe the instructional duties assigned to you by your supervising teacher.
8. What is our role when the supervising teacher is out of the classroom for other assignments (e.g., to co-teach in a classroom)?
9. What is the typical frequency and duration of these occurrences?

Leadership

10. How does the evaluation process for paraeducators enhance job performance?
11. Please share what changes you hope your district / school will achieve in the next five years.

LEADERSHIP TEAM (Optional Formats, see descriptor)

Questions:

SUPERINTENDENT and PRINCIPAL:

Leadership

(Superintendent)

1. How does the superintendent evaluation process benefit you and the board in working towards continuous improvement?

(Superintendent)

2. How does the administrator (superintendent, curriculum director, principal) evaluation process benefit administrators in their work?

Vision, Mission, Goals

(Superintendent)

3. How is the fiscal health of the district monitored and how is that information shared with stakeholders?

(Superintendent and Principal)

4. How do you share district information, progress, and needs with the community? Describe examples of community support.

(Principal)

5. In what ways do you seek input from the community, staff, parents, and students?

(Principal)

6. How is the collaboration between principal and teachers enhanced by the district's evaluation system?

(Principal)

7. How does the principal's feedback during the evaluation process lead to positive change in instruction and student achievement?

(Principal)

8. **Title IIA Required Question:** What steps does the district employ to ensure that poor and minority students are not taught at higher rates than other students by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers?

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(Principal)

9. **NCLB Required Question:** Describe the process used to maintain security of the ITBS / ITED test materials before, during, and after administration.

Leadership; Curriculum and Instruction

(Superintendent and Principal)

10. How would teachers describe your district's / school's shared vision of effective instruction? How do you, as administrators, foster that vision?

Professional Development

(Superintendent and Principal)

11. What is the district's / school's leadership structure for professional development?
12. What is the district's / school's process for determining the focus, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating professional development?

Learning Environment

(Superintendent and Principal)

13. How do you promote a school-wide environment that is safe, healthy, and inclusive for all students?

Monitoring and Accountability

(Principal)

14. **(For public school districts) Special Education Monitoring Question:** How are decisions made about IEP students' placement in classes?
15. **(For public school districts) Special Education Monitoring Question:** In what ways are enrollment patterns in classes monitored in regard to students with IEPs, particularly at the secondary level?

CURRICULUM DIRECTOR

Questions:

Professional Development

1. What is your involvement in determining the focus, design, implementation, and evaluation of professional development?

Curriculum and Instruction

2. What has your district / school learned from the Iowa Core process?
3. How does the district ensure students with diverse learning needs, including pre-schoolers, have access to the general education curriculum?

Vision, Mission, Goals

4. How do you ensure all district personnel are working towards the goals noted in the district's CSIP and APR?

EQUITY COORDINATOR

Leadership

1. How does the district notify staff, students, and parents about your role as Equity Coordinator?
2. What equity / diversity-related issues and/or grievances have you dealt with in the past year and what were the outcomes?

Leadership; Collaborative Relationships

3. How do students, parents, and staff get information about the district's procedure for processing grievances related to the non-discrimination and harassment policies?

Leadership; Learning Environment; Curriculum and Instruction

4. What are you doing to ensure that students and staff are culturally competent?

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Monitoring and Accountability

5. What have you learned from your most recent analysis of building, program, and course enrollment data by racial / ethnic background, gender, giftedness, and disability?

**LEARNING SUPPORTS STAFF
PRE-K – 12**

Questions:

Vision, Mission, and Goals

1. How does your program support the vision, mission, and goals of the district?

Leadership

2. How are you encouraged and supported to take on leadership roles?

Curriculum and Instruction

3. Please describe the components of the program you represent?

Collaborative Relationships

4. Please describe the opportunities you have for collaboration among colleagues, students, parents, and community. What are some examples of the purposes and results of collaboration?

Learning Environment

5. What does the district do to create and to sustain a safe learning and social environment for all students?
6. In what ways does your program contribute to a positive school climate for all students?

Professional Development

7. How do the professional development opportunities provided within or outside the district / school enhance your work with students and staff?

Monitoring and Accountability

8. What academic or academic-related data are collected and monitored to determine program effectiveness? Provide examples of changes in programs that have been made because of the use of data.

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9. Please share what changes you hope your district / school will achieve in the next five years.

PARENTS / GUARDIANS
Pre-K – 12

Questions:

Learning Environment

1. As a parent, what do you think the district, or your child's school, does well?
2. What stands in the way of your child's learning?

Collaborative Relationships

3. How does the district / school involve parents / guardians as partners in their child's education?
4. Describe the transition process that takes place as children move from level to level.

Monitoring and Accountability

5. In what ways and how frequently do you learn about your child's progress?

Curriculum and Instruction

6. In what ways does the district / school accommodate students with special learning needs in the regular education classroom?
7. In what ways does the district / school support learning experiences for children prior to kindergarten?

Learning Environment

8. How does the district / school ensure our students are safe at school, as well as to and from school?
9. How does the district / school monitor and investigate reported incidents of bullying and harassment?

Leadership

10. How are parents' concerns addressed and suggestions used?

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Vision, Mission, Goals; Curriculum and Instruction

11. Please share what changes you hope your district / school will achieve in the next five years.

PRINCIPALS
Pre-K – 12

Questions:

Vision, Mission, Goals

1. As a principal, how do you extend the district's vision, mission, and goals with staff, students, and parents?

Collaborative Relationships, Leadership

2. In what ways do principals seek and use input from staff, students, parents, and the community? Please provide examples of results.

Leadership

3. How does the collaboration between principals and teachers enhance the evaluation process and lead to positive changes in instruction and student achievement.

Learning Environment

4. How do principals promote a school-wide environment that is safe, healthy, inclusive, and caring for all students, staff, and families.
5. In what ways are school practices and classroom procedures student-centered?
6. **(For public school districts) Title IIA Required Question:** What steps does the district employ to ensure that poor and minority students are not taught at higher rates than other students by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers?

Curriculum and Instruction; Leadership

7. How do principals honor and support teaching and learning time for both students and staff?
8. How would teachers describe your building's shared vision of effective instruction? How do you, as a principal, foster the shared vision?
9. What has your district / school learned from the Iowa Core process?

Professional Development

10. What is the professional development leadership structure in your district and building?
11. Describe district and building processes for determining the focus of professional development, planning for teacher learning, and implementing, monitoring, and evaluating professional development.
12. How does professional development prepare all staff to address specific needs of students who have IEPs, are at-risk, potential dropouts, ELL, and/or gifted and talented?

Monitoring and Accountability

13. What are the processes used by the district and building to collect and to analyze formative and summative data regarding student achievement and program results?
14. **(For public school districts) NCLB-required question:** Describe the process used to maintain security of the ITBS and ITED test materials prior to, during, and after test administration.
15. **(For public school districts) Special Education Monitoring Question:** How are decisions made about IEP students' placement in classes?
16. **(For public school districts) Special Education Monitoring Question:** In what ways are enrollment patterns in classes monitored in regard to students with IEPs, particularly at the secondary level?

SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Questions:

SIAC

1. Please tell us what you view as the strength of this committee.

Leadership

2. What is your understanding of the role and responsibilities of this committee?
3. In the recent past, what are some of the recommendations this committee has made to the board of education?

Monitoring and Accountability

4. What data have been used to arrive at recommendations?

Leadership

5. Were the recommendations approved, and what has been the result?

Professional Development; Monitoring and Accountability

6. What training have you received in understanding and using data?

Vision, Mission, and Goals

7. What do you hope to see as district goals are set and priorities are determined?

CTE Advisory (i.e., Vocational Advisory)

1. What do you view as strengths of the district's CTE programs?

Leadership

2. What is your understanding of the role and responsibilities of this committee?

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Monitoring and Accountability

3. The end-of-year Perkins Performance Report includes information such as Academic Attainment (*i.e.*, math and reading), Graduation Rates, Non-traditional Participation and Completion, Technical Skill Attainment, Program Completion, and Placement. Based on the end-of-year data collection and analysis, what changes have been made to improve programs and what else needs to be done?
4. What other data have been used to assist in planning and evaluating CTE programs?

Leadership, Monitoring, and Accountability

5. Describe your involvement in approving the CTE technical skill attainment assessment.

Vision, Mission, and Goals

6. What do you hope to see as CTE goals are set and priorities are determined?

Title I Advisory (Use this protocol only in the event the district implements a Title I Advisory):

1. What do you view as the strength of this committee?

Leadership

2. What is your understanding of the role and responsibilities of this committee?

Collaborative Relationships

3. How do the school district and community work together to enhance student learning? Please provide examples.

Leadership

4. What recommendations has this committee made to district leadership and what has been the result?

Vision, Mission, and Goals

5. What do you hope to see as district goals are set and priorities are determined?

**SPECIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR / COORDINATOR
ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION CADRE TEAM MEMBER**

Questions:

CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN

1. In what areas was your district found to be non-compliant?
2. What were the district's goals and subsequent actions?
3. What improvements has your district initiated as a result of the CAP and how were data used to identify and monitor the improvements?

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT:

4. How is the district closing any gaps between students with IEPs and general education students?
5. How has the district determined the root cause of its gaps and what are its findings?
6. If there are no gaps, how has the district achieved or maintained this?
7. Are there any Special Education Indicators in which the district is discrepant? What actions are being taken by the district?

HQT / COLLABORATIVE TEACHING:

8. Please describe the district's collaboration model at each level (*i.e.*, elementary, middle, high school).
9. How are special education teacher schedules determined?
10. What training has been provided to the district's special and general education teachers regarding models of collaboration?

GENERAL QUESTION:

11. Does your district have any students who are National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC) eligible? If so, how does accessing Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) work in your district?

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND COLLABORATIVE GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS
Pre-K – 12

Questions:

Vision, Mission, and Goals

1. How do your practices reflect the vision, mission, and goals of the district?

Leadership

2. Describe your specific general education and special education roles in meeting student needs.
3. What system supports are in place to encourage and to maintain those roles?

Curriculum and Instruction

You were asked to bring and be familiar with your district's new District Developed Service Delivery Plan. The following questions focus on aspects of the plan.

4. What collaborative model do you use to instruct students with IEPs (e.g., co-teaching, consultation, or a combination of both?)
5. Provide examples of how you jointly plan and strategize for individual students.
6. Provide examples of instructional strategies you have shared with each other or discussed. Include content strategies from the content-endorsed teacher and access or support strategies from the special education teacher.
7. Who assigns the grade to the student with the IEP?

Special Education Teacher:

8. Do you provide pull-out instruction for the student? If so, what instruction to you provide in those sessions?

Collaborative Relationships; Curriculum and Instruction

9. Please describe how general education and special education staff work together to coordinate instruction and services for students, especially involving transitions from preschool to elementary, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, from one building to another, and from one grade level to another?

High School Teachers: Please describe the planning that takes place for student transition to post-secondary experiences.

Learning Environment

10. In what ways to the district and the school ensure that students have a safe, healthy, and caring learning environment?

Monitoring and Accountability

11. The following questions are about collaborative teaching:
- How do the district and the building assess collaborative teaching (e.g., the consultative model and the co-teaching model)?
 - Who uses that information?
 - What data points are collected?
 - What is the district learning about implementation?

STUDENTS

Questions:

Curriculum and Instruction

1. A student walks out of class in your school thinking, "That was a great class!" What made it a great class.
2. What stands in the way of student learning in this school?
3. In what ways to your teachers help students make real world applications to life outside the classroom?

Learning Environment; Curriculum and Instruction

4. What tools and technology are available in this school?
5. How do teachers and students use the technology available in the school?
6. What other tools and technology would be helpful to have available?
7. How is the school preparing students for the next level of education?

Leadership, Learning Environment

8. Describe the opportunities students have to develop and to use leadership skills and to provide input to school staff.

Monitoring and Accountability

9. How do your teachers know if you are learning?
10. How do you know if you are learning?

Learning Environment

11. When you think about the students in your school, those who are highly involved, those who are loners, those who may look or act differently than you, would all students say they feel safe in this school? Why or why not?

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12. What actions do students take if they are bullied or harassed or see that happening to someone else?

Leadership; Collaborative Relationships

13. Please share what academic and non-academic changes you hope your district / school will achieve in the next five years.

**SUPERINTENDENT, CURRICULUM DIRECTOR,
and EQUITY COORDINATOR**

Questions:

SUPERINTENDENT:

1. Please provide any further elaboration you wish on points addressed during the district overview.

Leadership

2. How does the superintendent evaluation process benefit you and the board in working toward continuous improvement?
3. How does the administrator (*i.e.*, central office administrators and principals) evaluation process benefit administrators in their work toward continuous improvement?
4. Describe the process and benefits of the district's administrator mentoring and induction program and how is the program's effectiveness determined?

Vision, Mission, and Goals

5. How is the fiscal health of the district monitored and how is information regarding finances, student achievement, and other aspects of the district / school communicated to the public?

Monitoring and Accountability

6. As a district, how are student learning data used systemically to improve teaching and student learning?
7. What is the district's process for program evaluation and what changes in programming have resulted from this information?

Collaborative Relationships

8. Describe examples of community support for the district.
9. This time is provided for the Superintendent to respond to team members' questions needing further clarification.

CURRICULUM DIRECTOR:

Professional development

1. What is your involvement in the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional development?

Curriculum and Instruction

2. What has your district / school learned from the Iowa Core process and how is the district / school using this information?
3. How does the district ensure that students with diverse learning needs, including preschoolers, have access to the general education curriculum? (G/T, At-Risk, alternative setting, ELL)

Vision, Mission, Goals

4. How do you ensure all district personnel are working toward the goals noted in the district's / school's CSIP?

Monitoring and Accountability

5. As a district, how are student-learning data used systemically to improve teaching and student learning?
6. This time is provided for the Curriculum Director to respond to team members' questions needing further clarification and/or for the Curriculum Director to elaborate on any specific topics they choose.

EQUITY COORDINATOR:

Leadership

1. How does the district notify staff, students, and parents about your role as Equity Coordinator?
2. How do students, parents, and staff get information about the district's procedure for processing grievances related to the non-discrimination and harassment policies?

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Leadership; Collaborative Relationships

3. What equity / diversity-related issues / grievances have you dealt with in the past year?

Leadership; Learning Environment; Curriculum and Instruction

4. What are you doing to ensure that students and staff are culturally competent?

Monitoring and Accountability

5. What have you learned from your most recent analysis of building, program, and course enrollment data by racial / ethnic background, gender, and disability?